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DOVE STUDY SHOWS WAY TO BETTER PROTECTION

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Setting dove hunting seasons for the South is a problem as they are likely to overlap the bird's nesting periods. The hunting seasons have opened in September, but in some southern States mourning doves nest until late in fall.

Officials of the U. S. Biological Survey and southern State game departments are hopeful, however, of solving this "dove problem." They have been holding conferences and studying reports on the bird's nesting habits with a view to reducing the kill of breeding and immature birds. Regulations governing the hunting of mourning doves are adopted under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which is administered by the Biological Survey.

Robert McClanahan, of the Survey, in studying the birds in Mississippi last fall, found many of them nesting when the season opened on September 15. Because of this condition, hunters' bags at that time contained more male than female birds.

An examination of 181 birds taken in Mississippi showed that 18 percent were in breeding condition during September. In an effort to determine the effect of shooting on nesting, surveys were made of an area hunted regularly and another area in which hunting was only occasional. Of the 88 doves collected in the regularly hunted place only 4 were possibly breeding. In the other area 13 of the 72 birds collected were in breeding condition.

The sport of dove shooting generally depends on the bird's swift flight, but this characteristic does not become fully developed in the young until they have been out of the nest for some time. It was found that even at the end of the

hunting period more than half the birds hatched the past season were still too young to provide for their own well being. Later in the season, in November, field work in Mississippi indicated that the doves had concentrated in flocks, nesting had ceased almost entirely, and both young and old birds had gained weight.

As information on the life history of the mourning dove is limited, the Biological Survey is continuing to study this bird. Data obtained will also be furnished the State game departments for their use in planning dove conservation programs.

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